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PASS TO PEACE CORPS

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ARROYO CONFERS AWARDS ON PEACE CORPS

REFS: A) Manila 1171; B) Manila 1189; C) Manila 1229

¶1. (U) On June 11, President Arroyo honored the Peace Corps with the presentation of two Order of the Golden Heart awards. The Order of the Golden Heart gives official recognition to Filipino or foreign citizens who have rendered distinguished service or volunteerism in the service of the Filipino people. The award conferred the rank of Officer to slain Peace Corps volunteer Julia Campbell and Grand Cross to the overall Peace Corps. A Peace Corps Volunteer and the Country Director accepted the awards in front of an audience including the Foreign Secretary of the Philippines, Chief of Police, Head of Armed Forces and Executive Secretary, U.S. Ambassador, Embassy and Peace Corps staff.

¶2. (U) Since 1961, more than 8,000 Peace Corps volunteers have served in the Philippines. Currently, they work in 38 provinces in programs focusing on vulnerable youth, education, and environment.

¶3. (U) Following the presentation ceremony, President Arroyo spoke with Ambassador, the Peace Corps Director, other staff, and a Volunteer. The President praised the Peace Corps program and remarked that the work in English language teaching is a critically needed contribution to the economic development of the Philippines. President Arroyo also cited Julia Campbell's role in aiding typhoon victims in Bicol. She praised all the volunteers who worked to aid victims of typhoons, floods and mudslides last year in Bicol. The Peace Corps Director described current efforts to start a Crisis Corps operation in the Philippines that will support planning for and delivery of assistance to disaster victims in the postdisaster period to help people get reestablished in their communities and become economically productive again. President Arroyo welcomed this Peace Corps initiative and commented that this is precisely the aspect of disaster relief assistance that the Philippines needs.

¶4. (U) More than 50 media representatives attended the ceremony, and spoke with the Ambassador, Peace Corps Director, and a volunteer after the event. Coverage repeatedly referred to and highlighted the long-term development and humanitarian contributions of the Peace Corps in the Philippines. Photos and articles appeared in nearly all of the daily national newspapers, including a front-page photo and article in the Philippines' largest daily newspaper. National television also covered the ceremony.

KENNEY